1; Junod M-5 (1895-1909) 1927 Thonga

881 a clever way that the men will be unable to untie them. Should one of the men succeed in undoing the knots, the boy will get a good thrashing during the meal, and so on.

The unhappy boys who are ill and cannot take part in the hunting trips must be on their guard ; when their comrades come back, much excited, they fall upon them with sticks and are allowed to beat them for not having come to help them.

[132] *Cold.* The months of June to August are the coldest of the South African winter and, during the night, the temperature falls to 41 Fah., or even lower. The boys lie naked in their shed,

Photo A. Jaques.

Circumcised boys sitting near the fire of "the Elephant"

heads turned towards the central court, and suffer bitterly from the cold. They are allowed to light fires in the court, but not near their feet, and it is said that one of the greatest trials of the Ngoma is that the head is warm and the feet cold. Moreover, they must always lie on their backs. Shepherds keep watch during the night and beat them if they lie on their side. No blanket is allowed, only light grass covers. The soil, not being smeared, swarms with a kind of white worm which bites severely during the night. Ashes are poured on the ground to kill them, but this is of but little use. In certain lodges, when there is a pool in the neighbourhood, the boys are led early in the morning into

old Egyptian monuments (1). The last mbaya were seen in the neighbourhood of Rikatla, when the war of 1894 broke out. In the Northern clans they were still commonly used by the generation which preceded Viguet, by the Nkunas who fled before Manukosi in 1835. (See Introduction to the *Grammaire Ronga*, page 17). The Kafirs of Cape Colony were still in 1903, at this stage of dress... or rather undress, and the Pedis of the Transvaal, with their *musindu* (a mere piece of skin protecting the genitalia), are not much in advance of the mbaya stage even now. This state of affairs arose in the first place from the fact that, as yet, the sentiment of modesty had hardly been conceived. It must not be supposed, however, that morals were the more depraved for that reason ; on the contrary, they were much purer, and innocence far more general, judging from the reports of those who remember those days. 291

But a second fact which allowed the Thongas to go about without clothing, 'in puris naturalibus,' or nearly so, is the warmth of the climate ; the temperature rarely drops below 44° Fahrenheit and frequently rises to 113° F., the annual mean near Lourenço Marques being about 74° F. according to our observations extending over seven years. It is thus easy to dispense with a coat in that part of the world, and it is by no means a rare occurrence to see children in the interior absolutely naked (2). 132 291

This very primitive article of attire has, however, been supplanted by one designed by the Zulus, and worn by men up to 177 291

(1) The "phallic sheath" of the earliest Egyptian statuettes, which is also to be noticed on the engravings of the XIX^th^ dynasty, as belonging to African populations, is not of quite the same pattern as the Thonga mbaya or the Sutho musindu. However there is a real similarity between all these primitive costumes ; many of the customs of the Bantus of to-day seem to have existed amongst the early Egyptians, and this fact shows that the origin of Egyptian civilisation is partially African. 177

(2) The Chopi tribe, which is very industrious, dwelling in the neighbourhood of the Thongas N. E. of the mouth of the Limpopo, has succeeded in obtaining a very superior kind of dress by beating the bark of the *mphama*, a kind of fig-tree which is wide-spread in the country, and which the Ba-Chopi even planted for this purpose. The pieces of bark become very soft and can be strung together. They are called *ntjala*. Several samples of this curious stuff can be seen in the Neuchâtel Museum. Thongas used to buy the article from their Chopi neighbours, but never knew how to manufacture it. 439

which has lost its strength that its "moya" has gone. It is also the moya which gives their potency to medical charms. 821 822

Another word for wind is *mheho*. Strong winds are called *shidzedze*. When they break trees and damage the mealies they are attributed to baloyi, wizards, who fight during the night, quarelling over the cobs.

One frequently hears about *timheho ta mune*, the four winds. They are called : *Ñwalungu*, the north wind, (a curious word perhaps connected with Balungu, the White men ; see later on) ; *Nyingitimu* (Ro.), or *Djonga* (Dj.), the South wind ; *Mupfanyaka*, the one coming from the plain of the black earth, the West Wind ; *Mfenya*, the sea breeze, coming from the East. Sailors who are great connoisseurs in this domain distinguish further the South Westerly wind, which they call *Mfenyakulu*, the great Mfenya. In Shiluvane, the West wind, which sometimes blows with great violence, coming down from the mountains of the Transvaal Plateau, is called *Burwa*, place of habitation of the Ba-Rwa (bu, locative prefix indicating a country). (Compare I. p. 18). Two other terms of the bu-ma class, also applied to East and West in all the clans, are : *Busha*, the spot where the sun rises (ku sha), the East, and *Bupeladambu*, the spot where the sun sets, the West. So there is no doubt that the Thongas possess the idea of the four cardinal points. 821 823 132

2) Native Geography.

The geographical notions of the tribe are, on the other hand, very scanty. As a rule, they do not think it possible to know a country, or place, where they have not travelled. Every one must compile his own geography. Hunters, and men engaged in commercial journeys, had some knowledge of the Spelonken (Bvesha), of Pietermaritzburg (Umgungundhlovu), of Kimberley (Dayiman), and now practically every grown-up Thonga has been to Johannesburg (Nkamben). But those who have always remained at home, women especially, show gross ignorance regarding their own country. I met some who were totally ignorant of the fact that the Nkomati River, which leaves the 823 815

reach heaven. The magician, seeing the thunderstorm approaching, climbs up the hill without any fear, blows in his flute: psee... psee... psee..., and shouts: "You! Heaven! Go further! I have nothing against you! I do not fight against you!" He may add in a threatening tone: "If you are sent by my enemies against me, I will cut you open with this knife of mine." The thunderstorm will then pass away! 821 791 789

This invocation to Heaven is curious, and we shall better understand it when studying the part played by Heaven in Thonga religion. Here I am merely considering the superstition as an attempt at explaining a natural phenomenon. And we may well ask: how is it possible for such absurdities to be believed, and firmly believed, by men who are not at all devoid of a sense of observation? The idea that lightning is a bird comes perhaps from the fact that its movements in falling from above resemble the evolutions of a bird in the air. After all the phenomenon is so sudden that this explanation could easily be accepted by the imagination of the savage. As regards the statements about the coagulated urine of the bird, I must admit that I was unable to understand on what they could be based, until I saw some samples of fulgurites found where lightning had struck the ground; the heat of the electric current vitrifies the sand, forming a kind of pipe, which enters the soil, where it ramifies to a certain depth. These fulgurites, though not perfectly answering to the description given by Native magicians, may have been the natural substratum upon which Bantu imagination built up all the other superstitions. 821

5) The problem of rain and the way Thongas deal with it.

All over the earth the question of rainfall is of primary importance, but this is especially the case in Subtropical Africa, even more than anywhere else. Rain may not fall during seven months, from April to October, and nobody worries about it. But if it fails in November and December, at the beginning of the rainy season, it is a dreadful misfortune, a calamity more serious 132 731 789

132 than any other. The life of every individual, and consequently
731 of the whole clan, is threatened. Famine will certainly follow,
789 as cereals can only be sown during these two months and famine means not only suffering and anguish, but often death, in a primitive tribe which is totally ignorant of trade with out-lying countries, and does not possess any means of conveyance for food bought in other lands. No wonder therefore that the imagination of the South African Native has invented ways and means of regularising the rainfall, and that rites, and charms, and all the powers of magic have been resorted to with a view to ensuring the precious rain to the tribe at the right time.

789 These methods may be classified in two categories : the rites which aim at removing the causes which are believed to prevent rain and the charms by which the rain is made to fall, irrespective of any preventing cause.

a) *The causes which prevent rainfall and the rites by which they are removed.*

821 The general view is that rain comes *from the gods* : "Psikwembu
789 psi nisa mpfula" — "the spirits of the ancestors cause rain to fall."
782 So, should the spring showers not come in due time, the first idea will be to offer a sacrifice to the ancestor-gods, especially if the bones consulted have revealed that the anger of the gods is the real
[533] cause. Men will go to the sacred wood where the ancestors have been buried, sing there an ancient mourning song (I suppose No. 15, page 286, is used for the purpose), and some of them will beat the graves with sticks. As regards the sacrifice, it consists of a black victim, or it may even be the offering of a living human being to the gods ; these rites will be described later on.

Or it may be that a certain individual, *a wizard*, endowed with magical power, or rather possessing enchanted drugs, prevents the rain from falling (a siba mpfula) through wickedness, or hatred of his countrymen. This is a rarer occurrence.

000 But the terrible calamity of drought is brought into direct

to the sacrifice of the black victim and to the In addition mbelele rite of purification of the land, which are characteristic Thonga customs, it seems that another old Thonga way of obtaining rain was the *tjeba fishing* which I described on p. 86. When the whole clan had gone to catch the barbels in the almost dried up ponds, a thunderstorm would come and rain would fall. This was especially the case with certain small lakes such as Malangotiba in Nondwane, and that in Nsime near Morakwen, because battles had taken place on their borders and the enemies' corpses had been thrown into the water. So these lakes had become "great sacred woods" (ntimu). I suppose the spirits of the deceased, which were certainly "gods of bitterness," (see next chapter), were supposed to prevent the rain, and the *tjeba* either appeased them or made them powerless.

To sum up this very complicated subject, I would say rain rites belong to three different categories: 1) The religious rites connected with ancestor worship (black offering, visit to the sacred woods, old songs and sometimes offering of a human victim). 2) Rites of purification of the land, those which are derived from the mysterious relations established between the power of Heaven and abnormal births (mbelele, cleaning of wells by women accompanied by the mother of twins); these present some features of the ordinary passage rites, either because the fall of rain inaugurates a new season, or because drought is a calamity comparable with death and attended with contamination. 3) The magic rites, in which sea charms play the most important part.

Hail, shihangu (Dj.), mabyana, lit. little stones (Ro.), is frequent in Thongaland; according to Mboza, it is not the object of any peculiar superstitions. Amongst the Pedis the day on which it has fallen must be kept as a sabbath. It is taboo to till the fields on that day.

IV. *The Inorganic World.*

Water is called *mati*, a noun of the bu-ma class, the class of liquids, employed only in the plural form. Notice the suffix *ti*, which seems to show that, at a period when mythological